DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 424 SP 036 173

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TITLE Synchromeshing (Teacher) Education and the Economy in Australia: Panacean or Problematic.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Economic Factors; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Political Power; *Politics of Education; Position Papers; Public Education; Public Policy; School Business Relationship; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Educators; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; Industry Role

ABSTRACT

The position adopted in this paper is developed in the context of literature relating to the politics and policies which are transforming Australian school and teacher education. The public education system in Australia has undergone rapid change and restructuring with the goal of national reconstruction and international competitiveness through education. The restructuring has resulted in increased debate on the purposes and priorities of education and brought into question the role teacher education should play in shaping the policy, practice, and outcomes of educational institutions. Economic and management policies have emphasized the efficiencies to be gained, socially and economically, by "synchromeshing" schools with the labor market, emphasizing training in the vocational skills and knowledge sought by industry, and cost-efficiency and accountability in the ethos, practices, and outcomes of educational institutions. The professional literature suggests that in orchestrating the debate on public education, for all intents and purposes, the Federal Government has marginalized teacher educators. The first section of the paper examines the politico-economic context of education policy in Australia. The second section presents a critical analysis of the so-called "neutral" outlook in teaching in the present climate. Finally, the third section considers the active part that teacher educators should play in their own empowerment. The paper concludes that the challenge for teacher educators is to understand the increasing need to become political actors, in terms of influencing the agenda and discourse in education, while at the same time, due recognition must be given to the reality of the present national politico-economic situation within in a global context. (Contains 67 references.) (ND)

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1995

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SYNCHROMESHING (TEACHER) EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY IN AUSTRALIA: PANACEAN OR PROBLEMATIC.

Clarrie Burke

Abstract

The position adopted in this paper is developed in the context of literature relating to the politics and policies which are transforming Australian school and teacher education today. The agenda and discourse in contemporary Australian education has been increasingly dominated by the economic rationalist and corporate managerialist policies pursued by the Federal Government. As a result the education system has undergone rapid change and restructuring - the goal being national reconstruction and international competitiveness through education. School and teacher education are considered by government as an arm of economic policy, thereby reflecting a basically instrumentalist and technical efficiency approach stemming from economistic, managerialist and political motivations rather than educational or moral considerations. In orchestrating the debate on public education the government has marginalised teacher educators. Given this situation, it is clear that teacher educators need to take a more proactive and interventionist stance in terms of influencing the agenda and discourse in education. This is vital in the quest for a rightful stake in the ownership of teacher education and the conduct of public education, which have become highly politicised. The challenge for teacher educators is to understand the increasing need to take an active part in ensuring that government policy developments are understood and critiqued from national and international perspectives, and that substantive educational, social justice and ethical issues are duly incorporated in the ongoing debate. In pursuing this goal of reprofessionalisation and empowerment, the formation of meaningful, interactive field (i.e.'chalkface') linkages and support networks with the school and college system, other higher education sector workers, relevant professional associations, and other allied sectors which connect to government, is essential. Thus teacher education can be recognised as playing a key role in the purpose and direction of education policy and practice, cognisant of the national and global context, and with a broad base of support.

Introduction

The public education system in contemporary Australia has undergone rapid change and restructuring - the goal being national reconstruction through education. Consistent with international trends, educational policy in Australia has been manipulated by the dominance of market ideology translated into economic rationalism. This is evident in the way government has sought to rationalise public spending and integrate educational policy more fully with industrial needs. Concomitantly a strong trend towards management along corporate lines has been applied to public education as a means to that end. In recent years economic rationalism and corporate managerialism have had a profound determining effect on the national education agenda and the master discourse which has shaped educational policy and practice.

Within this context school education and teacher education are considered by government and industry as an arm of economic policy. The effect is a basically instrumentalist, 'technical

efficiency' approach stemming from economistic, managerialist and political motivations, and generally short on educational, social justice or ethical considerations. From this perspective education is viewed as the basic and long term provider of 'graduates' who will readily become efficient units of production for the continuing enhancement of Australia's economic capacity and international competitiveness.

This view has hijacked the debate about the purpose and priorities of education, largely displacing other perspectives and understandings. This predicament, brings into question the role teacher education needs to play in order to make a more substantive contribution to shaping policy, practice and outcomes of educational institutions in Australia at this time.

The position adopted in this paper is developed in the context of literature relating to the politics and policies which are transforming Australian school and teacher education today. The first section examines the politico-economic context of education policy in Australia in which the educational dilemmas are currently being played out. The second section presents a critical analysis of the so-called 'neutral' outlook in teaching in the present climate. Finally Section Three considers the active part that teacher educators need to play in their own reprofessionalisation and empowerment - critiquing economically driven developments and advocating educational, social justice and ethical considerations which move the profession on, while duly recognising the reality of interconnections within the national and global politico-economic context.

The political-economic context of education policy in Australia

Much of the direction and purpose of change in education policy in Australia today, stems from a shift in economic logic and policy. Reflecting the ascendancy and incorporation of 'new right' ideology in mainstream Australian politics, the shift is based on the deregulated market thinking of the organised coalition of free market liberals and conservatives. The goal is increased viability for Australia within a global market by modelling so-called 'international processes of best practice'. This was reflected in 'The National Reform Agenda' outlined in the ACTU's 'Australia Reconstructed' (ACTU/TDC 1987) in which, as Taylor and Henry (1994:110) point out, 'the ACTU explicitly locates its 'new economism' in a context of a broader social democratic discourse, [in which] once again economic modernisation seems to be the main game'.

Referred to as 'economic rationalism', this orientation is driven by the economic benefits of investment in education. In effect this has meant tying education in closely with the needs of the economy.

In his comments about the prime movers outside of the education profession that are driving educational reform, the Director General of Education in N.S.W. noted that 'It is significant that the people who are most clearly setting the pace of current reform [in education] are industrialists - Brian Finn, Eric Mayer, Ivan Deveson - and trade unionist (and ex Communist) Lawrie Carmichael' (Boston 1992). As a result public educational institutions are increasingly being called upon to adopt the entrepreneurial, organisational and managerial practices of private industry. Ramsey (1991:34, cited in Hanly, 1994) reveals how this mindset underscores the push for national policies in education:

- Education is not an industry which can be isolated from what is happening to the economy in general.

- There is an imperative need for a more flexible school to workforce pathway which can help persons to adapt to changed workplace operations, jobs and locations. To achieve this sort of change we must have a national approach to education.

Within the context of diminishing financial resources, governments have issued directives to rationalise public spending in response to the growing public perception that governments at all levels are wasteful, inefficient and unresponsive to community needs. With the reining-in of public service expenditure in recent years there has been a call by government that the public should receive more 'value for money' for its public service dollar. To this end such means as 'structural efficiency', 'quality assurance' and 'accountability' have been set in place to give public assurance that schools supported by its taxes would be more responsive, purposeful, efficient and accountable. In this way Government policy has placed a priority on efficient management with an emphasis on cost effectiveness and efficient allocation and use of resources. According to Beare (1989), what this means in effect is that educators are being asked not only to stress the 3Rs, but also what he refers to as the '4Es' - efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and excellence. Beare issues a cautionary note about education policies designed to gain better use of its dollar resources in the manner adopted by government at present. While education may need to give a better account of itself, he is circumspect about the adoption of market solutions to education problems, and in particular when this means describing educational outcomes more precisely, and measuring those outcomes with economic-type-indicators. However, it is apparent that economic factors have become major determinants of decisions about the purpose, management and outcomes of the public education system at all levels. Based on human capital theory, this view is predicated on the assumption that raising the economic productivity of the educated individual will result in more economic output, economic wealth and national economic growth. From this standpoint 'economic rationalism' has provided the conceptual scaffolding and steering mechanism for the formulation of Australian education policy aimed at national economic recovery and international competitiveness. There is little doubt that this reflects the government's intention to assert greater political control over a narrower policy agenda in Australian education.

The widespread application of this economic frame of reference in the restructuring of education policy and practice is reflected in the common usage of such 'buzzwords' as the 'business of education', 'education means business', the 'education industry', 'marketing and market-driven education', 'effective school management to gain a competitive edge in order to enhance leverage', and so on. This gives an indication of the degree of public acquiescence to the presentation of economic rationalism by governments with 'new right' leanings, during the recent hard (recessionary) and changing economic times. As Harris explains: 'It [economic rationalism] has become constructed as a form of analysis allegedly well suited to contextualising and understanding education in a changed modern era, while at the same time managing to be critical of past legitimated approaches without totally alienating those traditional intellectuals who championed liberal idealism. ...Its success in achieving this has enabled it to effectively 'naturalise' education as an industry and contextualise schools as competitors in some educational market place' (1994:113).

This repositioning and 'reculturing' of the 'education industry' came into public prominence in Australia in the late 1970s. A watershed in the development of contemporary Australian education policy and practice occurred in 1979 with the publication of the major government commissioned report entitled 'Education, Training and Employment', known as 'The Williams' Report' (Williams 1979). According to the Williams' Committee, schools had failed to adapt to changes in the economy and society. The Report explained youth unemployment in terms of shortcomings of the education system. In its findings the Committee recommended the rationalisation of the post-secondary sector and the refocussing of education on a more 'vocationally-oriented' curriculum. A major effect of 'The William's Report' was that the spotlight was set upon education's role in the economy. Educationists and policy makers were made to look searchingly at the points of junction between education and employment.

There was considerable activity in the review of teacher education at the national level (Auchmuty 1980) and in the states (Victoria: Asche 1980; New South Wales: Correy 1980; Western Australia: Vickery 1980) soon after the publication of the William's Report. According to Coulter and Ingvarson (1985), these reports were disappointing in that they made little significant difference to the practice of teacher education in Australia. Attention was directed, in the main, to increasing the qualifications of teachers by lengthening the pre-service program from the three-year Diploma in Teaching to the four-year Bachelor of Education, and reconstructing the structure and curriculum. In the mid-1980s teacher education drew criticism from the Quality of Education Review Committee (Karmel et al 1985:117) on the basis of inadequate development of teacher skills and knowledge in the basics, gender equity and problem solving. However, it was noted that all the reports sought to cultivate 'greater awareness of the effects of technological and social change on the roles which schools and teachers were expected to perform' (Coulter and Ingvarson 1985:30). But it seems that this recognition of social, economic and technological context and change was more alluded to, than substantively addressed so as to make a difference to educational policy development.

The net effect was that, despite all the reports and the efforts to increase qualifications and improve the quality of teacher preparation, the teaching profession at all levels continued to receive bad press on a number of grounds (Evans in Eltis 1987:13). Despite these unfavourable public perceptions, there was little sign of teacher education taking concerted action to influence public opinion about the merits of its recent endeavours, and to shape policy developments at national and state levels.

In 1987, nearly a decade after 'The William's Report', the policy intention to harness schooling to the economic and training agendas was formalised by the then Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training in 'Strengthening Australia's Schools' (Dawkins 1987). This paper paved the way for policy (re-) development, institutional restructure and curriculum redirection in the Australian education system at all levels. Subsequently, in 'Higher Education: A Discussion Paper', the Minister announced that:

> A better educated and more highly skilled population will be able to deal more effectively with change, ... [E]ducation facilitates adaptability, making it easier for individuals to learn skills related to their intended profession and improve their ability

> to learn while pursuing that profession. Adaption to technological change is also facilitated by a better skilled and educated workforce.
>
> ... Schools and tertiary institutions must play a more purposeful role in lifting Australia's economic competitiveness, but they must do so without increasing their demands on the public purse. (Dawkins 1987a:3).

By this time economic rationalist goals were clearly driving social policy developments of the federal government. The perspective and approach were central to the government review and restructure of public service management, in a manner that Knight et al (1990) characterised as 'corporate federalism'. In so doing the government embraced the organisational structures and administrative processes of private sector corporations. The effect of this corporate managerialist mindset on education policy has been both powerful and widespread, prompting the Director-General of Education in Queensland to state that 'the managerial aspects of economic rationalism have come to dominate thinking among [education] policy makers in all parties, in most states' (Scott 1993:4). The multitude of rules and routine processes of the centralised hierarchical departmental organisations was replaced by considerable devolution of responsibility, allowing more organisational discretion and initiative to managers who are actually responsible for service delivery. This reflected the belief that the principles and practices of 'corporate managerialism' would create a rational system in which quantitative processes and controls normally associated with private sector management could be utilized in educational environments.

The emergent policy assumed that if education personnel are transformed from being education leaders to managers, then management sector expertise, efficiency and productivity will be transferred to the educational environment. Harmer (1991:3) postulates that 'generally the restructuring efforts appear to be part of an attempt to make the management of education more efficient, more accountable, more responsive to government policies, and to place much greater emphasis on educational outputs... There is an increased use of the market metaphor, and a tendency to see education as a service to be delivered or as a commodity.' As this market-driven view would have it, education is a commodity which can be 'bought' and 'sold'. In this context of commercialization and commodification, 'Educational democracy is redefined as consumer democracy in the educational supermarket. **Buying** an education becomes a substitute for **getting** an education. Consumers seek the competitive edge at the expense of others and look for value-added education' (Kenway et al, 1993:116). Education therefore needs to be marketed successfully. But first a tougher businesslike outlook and uncompromising quality of output are required in the schools: 'if school machines were run more efficiently, if quality-control measures were more rigorous, if production goals were increased, and if management would get tough and take control, then the product (student performance) would be greatly improved' (Shaw and Reyes 1992:295).

The far reaching effects on education can be seen in the manner by which policy and practice have been played out in the Australian states in recent years. Events in Queensland illustrate developments well. Corresponding developments may be found in other states.

Consistent with the national thrust, early in its first term the Queensland Labor Government readily declared its belief that '... there is an essential connection between employment, education and training' (ALP 1989:14). Furthermore, the Government's education policy for

Queenslanders in 1989 sought to rationalise public spending and integrate education policy more fully with industrial needs by means of a leaner and more efficient Department of Education. This was reflected in the Government's plan to restructure the Department of Education along corporatist lines consistent with developments in the state public service, in accordance with what the government referred to as 'the principles of increased efficiency, effectiveness, impartiality and accountability' (Davies, cited in Matheson 1990:2).

The means to this end was detailed in the Department's 'Corporate Plan: 1994-1998' (Department of Education 1994) which reflects Government policies and initiatives, and provides the framework for school and regional planning. Within this framework educational jargon is being replaced by industry jargon. The Corporate Plan reflects the 'program' approach to public service management. It serves to 'guide' the operations of program and sub-program management groups, through statements of 'corporate mission', 'corporate values' and 'strategic priorities'. Quality assurance/control is achieved through 'strategies for accountability', and mechanisms such as 'specific program performance indicators'. It is worth noting that, among his comments on the Department's recent performance reporting, the Under Treasurer (Smerdon, 1994:2) indicated in a letter (12 July 1994) to the Department that:

- performance measures must be supported by appropriate data collection systems; and
- Treasury officers will be involved in the development of the Department's next Corporate Plan, its targets and related data collection/analysis systems.

This message has been conveyed to Regional Planning Teams, and will become dictates for Schools Operations Program executive officers. It is not difficult to imagine how, ultimately, this will impact upon school management style, and in turn, teaching and learning practices.

The net effect is that Queensland schools are experiencing mounting pressure to become more entrepreneurial, to 'produce more for less', and at the same time achieve certain goals and standards (e.g. toward developing Australia as the 'clever country') through strategic planning. Given the substantial diminution of financial resources during the recession and the hegemonic cry for 'quality assurance' and 'education for work' to ensure certain returns for capital outlays on education, school effectiveness and accountability have been defined and measured in technocratic, corporate-managerial, cost-efficient terms. Concern has been expressed that this approach has tended to redefine education and re-establish its priorities (Beare 1989), inhibit the equity agenda (Lingard 1990), diminish the significance of the humanities and critical social sciences in the curriculum (Burke 1993), and create a narrowly skilled 'teacher as technician' (Koop and Bezzina 1993) rather than critically reflective teachers (Knight et al 1990, Ball 1993).

Considering the attention paid to school-community consultation in the supposedly seamless P-10 curriculum in Queensland in recent years, it is important to note that where three major national reports (Finn 1991, Carmichael 1992, and Mayer 1992) have coincided, there is now considerable confusion in the school system as to its role in education and training. The three national reports have focussed on the higher levels of schooling - particularly Years 11 and 12 and post-school training - in terms of the work needs of industry. This has given rise to:

- the widespread preoccupation with employable competencies (i.e. generic skills essential for emerging patterns of work and work organization)

- the increasing influence on the part of employers in industry over education policy

- the growing number of vocational courses in schools, and Adult and Workplace Education programs in universities.

For these reasons the economic imperative to produce a workforce with 'winning (work) skills' has distracted from a more basic focus on the P-10 curriculum. There is a clear need for the teaching profession to recognise that the emphasis on work oriented, competency-based education deriving from industry, union and government pressure to vocationalise the curriculum, could seriously undermine the nature and purpose of a balanced curriculum - particularly in primary and lower secondary schooling.

The relationship between education and the workforce regularly arises in the public debate about Australian education. A recent example concerns the so-called 'literacy war' in Australia. The national newspaper, 'The Australian', in its weekend edition, 'The Weekend Australian' (July 16-17, 1994), ran a by-line in the 'Review' section entitled 'If children are to succeed in the future workplace in an ever more complex world, they must be highly literate'. The article went on to explain: 'The backdrop to the literacy war is Australia's push to join the growth economies of South East Asia, the literacy demands of the new workplace in our restructured industries, and the speed of technological change. While some academics refute a connection between increases in literacy rates and economic growth, few experts dispute that today's children will need to be highly literate to survive in the future workforce ...' (Hope 1994).

At the level of rhetoric the approach is seductive in the manner by which it appears to carry education towards an efficient, competitive and productive industrial culture, and processes of global production. However, this approach is not without serious challenge.

Bates (1987:83) views this politico-economic movement as a paradigm shift from bureaucratic control to ideological control, contending that the ideological control it exerts legitimises certain views, while systematically marginalising or even silencing others. Furthermore, Bates asserts that it is an intervention into the very consciousness, as it bypasses the traditional bureaucratic hierarchical set of rules, penalties and rewards while substituting a new ideology of the 'market place'. In complementary vein Pusey (1992:64) questions the 'uni linear, monological and inflexible economic theory' on which the movement is based. The underlying utilitarian mindset leaves little room for social constucts in the discourse of intellectual development in education. It reflects a form of 'intellectual colonisation' by government, driven by industry.

Giroux (1992:7) draws attention to a serious deficiency in this approach within the context of education: 'the refusal of the new educational reform movement to develop critical moral discourse.' He explains this in terms of the human dimensions of the classroom milieu:

> Missing from the current mainstream emphasis on educational reform is a language that can illuminate what administrators, teachers, and other cultural workers actually

> do in terms the underlying principles and values that structures the stories, visions and experiences they use to organize and produce particular classroom experiences and social identities.

The approach lacks what Freire (1985) refers to as 'conscientization', that is, critical examination of the prevailing political and economic pressures on education, against sociological realities. As Freire would have it, the ensuing critical consciousness and social conscience is a preliminary to the action necessary to combat the social injustice to which an unbridled market-driven approach would inevitably give rise.

Citing Ball, McFadden points out that prevailing government policies fail to develop a 'grounded analysis of the particular conditions of a market in education services [and to] fully explore the real potential inequities arising within an educational market' (Ball 1993:3). McFadden (1994:10-11) goes on to explain how quality and access provisions now in place for certain disadvantaged and marginalised groups would be undermined:

> ...corporatisation of the Further Education sector, and the related policies of rationalisation and efficiency will have a major impact on the capacity of colleges to provide quality for the students that access provision was originally intended for ... Underlying the concerns ... is a fear that homogeneity and elitism, under the guise of excellence and choice, will be emphasised in a corporate F E world, rather than difference and real diversity being both celebrated and catered for.

While governments continue to espouse an equity agenda in education, it has been reformulated so as to accommodate, and operate within the climate of economic rationalism, and finds justification in economic production terms (Porter et al in Crowther et al 1994: 219). Whatever the intent, one serious effect, as Junor (1991:128) has observed, is that public funds are increasingly being redirected away from social spending, leading to increasing educational inequity.

It can be inferred from the preoccupation with economic performance, efficiency and productivity, that ethics, conspicuous by its absence in the government-orchestrated discourse, is not a marked feature of the governments' approach to public sector management. The issue arises as to how to build an ethical organization and workplace in the prevailing market-driven circumstances. Applied ethicist Preston (1994) questions whether there is a place for personal conscience or professional integrity in the exercise of duty to government policies and procedures in Australia at this time. Preston's critical analysis of ethics for the public sector (including educational institutions) warns of the danger to society of staff at all levels who are technically competent or strategically astute, but ethically illiterate.

It is worth noting that, in Queensland for example, much of the development of public sector ethics has taken place, not as an inherent feature of economic rationalism or corporate managerialism, but rather as a function of the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC) - instituted on the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry in Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct [in Queensland] (Fitzgerald 1989). As in other states of Australia this 'code of conduct led recovery' was, in part, a response to the fraud, corruption and abuse of office/trust arising out of the tendency of the public sector to assimilate patterns of self-interest and entrepreneurship which characterised

the 'corporate excesses of the 1980s'. While 'there is growing activity on ethics for public officials within various jurisdictions' (Preston 1994:3), there is still a dearth of literature documenting 'Australia's search for the foundations of a constitutional morality capable of supporting ethics in public office' (Uhr 1994:552).

Neutrality in teaching - an untenable approach

'Politics', in the Aristotelian sense, suggests the interplay of people(s) in various forms of social or organisational groupings in terms of power. It has to do with dominance or subordination. 'Being political' in this sense has considerably broader meaning than the position people take in the affairs of government and political parties.

From this broader perspective it is apparent that teaching, of its very nature, purpose and modus operandi, can hardly be considered remote from the politics of society. Despite this, the view that teaching at all levels ought to be 'politically neutral' is taken for granted by many teachers and teacher educators alike. That by not taking a 'political' stand in teaching of curriculum, teachers and teacher educators can be objective and apolitical. However, perhaps more now than ever before, this prevailing view of teacher neutrality needs to be seriously questioned.

Kleinig (1978: 43-46) questions and criticises the premises upon which the case of teacher neutrality largely rests, on a number of grounds. He argues that, despite neutralist rhetoric and idealism, this position in practice, invariably promotes such liberal democratic values as tolerance, respect for persons, majority rule and equality. Moreover, the nature of the curriculum, the methods, texts, student-teacher relationships, and basic classroom organisation and management can hardly be said to be 'neutral', for they already reflect very definite choices and value positions made by powerful segments of society from the existing range of values, ideas, principles, processes and goals. At the same time, certain assumptions made about human development and the value of individuality are hardly neutral or uncontroversial. In the final analysis, Kleinig points out, the neutralist position is itself a value judgement, which renders it self-defeating.

Like Kleinig, Ginsburg (1992:2) also questions the assumptions underlying the 'neutral' or 'apolitical' stance:

> Such arguments rest partly on the invalid assumption of a distinction between professional, intellectual and technical activity, on the one hand, and political activity, on the other [as though they are mutually exclusive, rather than differing dimensions of phenomena].

Ginsburg stresses the point that the so-called 'neutral' stance cannot be held to be apolitical when he states:

> [E]fforts to represent education and the work of educators as neutral (professional, intellectual, technical, etc.) are in fact political acts, having consequences for the distribution of power and of material and symbolic resources ... for educators ...

It must also be recognised that, for teachers and teacher educators to take their curricula as a given, and to teach it in a 'neutral', 'objective' or 'apolitical' fashion, is to tacitly accept, uncritically comply with and promulgate the beliefs and the authority of the power group most determining of the subject matter, processes and expectations of the prevailing curriculum. Their silence gives consent ... tacitly. This serves to legitimate the processes in the public eye. And the currently prescribed or established curriculum comes to be regarded as the only rational and valid set of ideas suitable for teaching in educational institutions. Over time, this attitude inevitably leads to such curricula becoming enshrined as the 'legitimate culture' of formal education. To criticise it then is to commit sacrilege.

What is taught and assimilated consciously (formal curriculum) and unconsciously ('hidden curriculum') in schools has been referred to as 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). And what subsequently happens to students largely reflects the social, economic and political beliefs of the 'ruling class', which in Australia is characterised by 'middle-class culture' (Connell et al 1982). Those students coming from a home culture which has a high correspondence with the 'culture' of the school are most adept at handling and exploiting the benefits of the competitive, academic - largely hegemonic and hierarchical - curriculum. Thus they gain more ready access to 'cultural assets' which enhance their socio-economic prospects.

To this end schools serve a sorting and selecting function, and thereby reinforce the political and ideological basis of the existing inequitable socio-economic structure. In so doing, educational institutions wittingly or unwittingly, facilitate the establishment/continuance of 'cultural hegemony'. This is so much a part of Australian society now, that no extra provision, beyond existing assessment and selection schemes, needs to be made to keep the economically hierarchical, inequitable system in tact.

Society in general, and teachers and teacher educators in particular, must be prepared to face up to the claim that has been made for some time, and is well substantiated now - that the structure of schooling actually, and perhaps unwittingly, reproduces the structure of inequity itself. In fact, analysts of 'reproduction theory' such as Branson and Miller (1979) assert that the education system as a whole actually reproduces an unequal society along socio-economic lines. McFadden (1994) contemporises this message. He asserts that current market reforms in education are, in effect, a class strategy leading to reproduction of relative social class advantages and disadvantages. For this reason, McFadden argues, they should be considered a cultural attack on the provision of educational opportunity.

This situation is exacerbated, by the Australian government and industry view that public education is an arm of economic policy, and is part of the social process of commodity production. The OECD (1987:69) has argued that this approach to contemporary economics calls for particular knowledge, skills and attitudes in the workforce. In essence the process derives from human capital theory and thus involves the training of people as multi-skilled workers who will enhance economic production. In Australia this continues to occur within an inequitable socio-economic structure which favours the middle class.

Within this context can the professional educator (at whatever level) be anything but a political being?

According to Deer et al (1994:14):

> It is no longer possible, if it ever were, to remain complacently isolated and aloof from real politik. The social practice of education is unequivocally a political practice and intrusions of government policy are in fact legitimate rights of intervention within the context of a democratic society. The last few years have seen governments of all persuasions assert those rights.

While there have been calls for a 'network of resistance' to struggle against the present thrust of government policy (Junor 1991), Aspin's challenging 'Agenda for Action' (in Crowther et al 1994: 188-189) and Smyth's (1994) approach to 'critical pedagogy' can serve as catalysts for teacher educators to think as political actors in the developing agenda and discourse in Australian education. This calls for proactive and concerted intervention which is informed, socially responsible and anticipatory. Thus learning the language of government policy development in education is crucial so as to engage in the political process in a sophisticated manner. An important consideration, however, involves asking the right questions about how to improve the quality of education within a tight budget. The key here is to recognize, also, the need for professional solidarity on the part of teacher educators and other allied 'scholastic practitioners'.

Underlying the 'Agenda for Action' are five searching questions which provoke a range of possible political actions, and which incorporate substantive educational considerations:

1. How might Higher Education Institutions and their teacher education courses promote a better understanding of and a closer cooperation with the community, employing authorities, Ministries and Departments, and business and industry - whilst not losing institutional autonomy and academic standards?

2. How might teacher education courses respond to and act on the changing nature of knowledge, learning and schooling, with particular regard to the provision of mainstream and alternative education and training pathways for post-compulsory schooling?

3. How might Higher Educational Institutions develop and strengthen cooperation with local and national employment authorities to ensure appropriate funding and support for initiatives of this kind?

4. How might links between Higher Educational Institutions, professional organisations and teacher education research agencies be developed, strengthened and capitalised on so as to provide sources of mutual benefit and support?

5. How might teacher educators develop and implement the findings of research into the theory and meta-theory of effective pedagogy, so as to move towards a best-practice-and-theory approach in the production of a competent and self-critical teaching force in schools, capable of meeting the academic, epistemic, social and economic challenges of the twenty-first century and ready to offer new policies and programs for the improvement of the society in which teaching shall serve as agents dedicated to preparing the world's children for that new era?

In what are, in effect, complementary movements, social justice (Lingard 1990) and ethics (Preston 1994) advocates are actively working towards public policy frameworks which will institutionalize education and training for public sector managers. This has given rise to managers increasingly seeking guidance to broaden their understanding of the principles and processes of social justice and ethics in the workplace.

Reprofessionalisation and Empowerment: Teacher Educator as Political Actor

Deer et al (1994) have examined recent changes in government policy which have given rise to the current climate of educational reform and restructuring within schools and tertiary institutions, directly affecting teacher education in Australia. A key issue is 'the prevailing and often competing discourses regarding ownership of teacher education, and the ways in which becoming increasingly politicised has affected the teacher educators themselves' (p.1). As they point out, teacher educators can no longer afford the romanticised view that teacher education can be separate from shifts in social, economic and educational policy which are being mapped on to the terrain of the education system. It is undeniable fact that educational institutions are being pressed into service for industry to serve its purposes. It boarders on wilful indifference and professional irresponsibility for teacher educators to remain remote, impartial and inert towards the increasing willingness by government to allow big business to dictate education priorities through determinations for greater accountability and structural/management efficiency measures in public institutions.

Despite the continued rhetoric of government policy about the need for excellence in teaching and teaching professionalism, the emerging political reality seems to be the establishment of a 'teacher-proof' system (Porter, et al 1992). It is this mindset that has led federal and state governments to frame educational policies largely in terms of the Finn/Mayer/Carmichael agendas which include the development of teacher competencies in an industrialised format (Knight and Lingard 1993). The governments' agenda for teaching, and for teacher education, is clear: link improved productivity with a multi-skilled, competent, workforce. Deer et al (1994:11) explain it thus:

> [Governments] define teacher competencies so that teachers, and teacher educators who 'train' them, can be held accountable in a very public way for the quality of teaching ... in schools. [The] dominant position ... in the discourse of professional training, accountability and ultimately control of schools and their curriculum, [is] that of the Minister. [In NSW, the Minister revealed her government's agenda by indicating the need for an enshrined] checklist of key competencies that could be transformed unproblematically and administered to prospective teachers to determine their suitability for employment.

Whitty (1994) notes with suspicion the instrumentalist basis from which governments are advocating the development of craft skills and competencies - that is, because they are assumed to be:

- directly measurable by economic calculus

- associated with practical, occupationally relevant performance outcomes and products.

As such they are presented as the key to securing employment. However, within this context there is cause for concern about the deemphasis of professional understanding - including a lack of critical moral and ethical discourse among political and administrative career officials of existing institutions of government (Uhr 1994, 554). Within the domain of education the specification of, and focus on particular competencies, Whitty(1994:9) asserts, is an attempt to deprofessionalize teaching, in that it encourages uncritical and restricted, rather than extended notions of professionalism and professionality.

Contributing to this delimitation of professional understanding is the encouragement of the Commonwealth Government of close teaching and research links between education and private industry, which amounts to a partial privatisation of the functions of universities and TAFE colleges:

> Computing students at tertiary levels can now do whole sections of their courses by working for firms such as IBM. This gives employers control over course design and helps ensure that graduating students enter the workforce with attitudes shaped by the corporate sector...Private industry is to have a closer relationship with schools, and a greater say in their curriculum. In the new technology high schools in New South Wales, the link with companies, such as computer multinationals will amount to one of sponsorship (Junor 1991:180).

It is apparent that present approaches to policy formulation by both federal and state governments have important implications for the professional integrity, standing and involvement of teacher educators. Recent interventions of a political nature by the Australian Council of Deans of Education to address contradictions and discrepancies in government policies and funding levels in teacher education and postsecondary education (Deer et al 1994) is laudable, but it illustrates the spasmodic, fragmented, and reactive nature of the response by professional educators. It behoves teacher educators to be more concerted and holistic in striving for representation and impact on government bodies which set about studying, reviewing and/or reforming the education system. One prospective avenue cited by Knight et al (1993:47) is the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning report (1992) entitled 'Proposal to establish a National Teaching Council', which recommends a partnership between the parties concerned with professional standards - including teacher educators. Such 'parties' could include, for example, the Australian Education Council (AEC) which has played a significant role in forming and informing the national agenda for education, as Hanly (1994:3) has pointed out. 'The AEC has a steering committee consisting of Director-General or Secretary controlling each state, territory, government education system. This Committee vets/summarises/recommends on virtually every item going to the AEC concerning school education - it very clearly controls the national agenda' (Spicer 1990:1, cited in Hanly 1994:3). Hanly (1994:6) also points to the potential contribution of school principals in this endeavour, through the formation of the new body, the Australian Principals Associations' Professional Development Council (APAPDC). Such professional associations as the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) and the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA) which serve the interests of teacher educators as academic platforms for sharing research and professional analysis, need to

consider also their potential as rallying/pivotal points for political intervention. This prospective function would enable these Associations to play a more proactive role in influencing the agenda and policy development in Australian education. Thus the 1994 ATEA Conference theme: 'Empowering the Professional: Politics, Policy and Practice', could become a key element in the mission and modus operandi of the Association. It is noteworthy that Bates, in the cogent critique contained in his presidential address to the 1994 conference of the AARE drew attention to this cause (Bates 1994), as he has done on other occasions in recent times (Bates 1994a, 1994b).

An important consideration at this point is that in the past teacher educators, through rather traditional approaches (i.e. disciplines and programs in psychology, sociology and philosophy of education) have seriously underplayed their hand by not addressing the political and economic circumstances in Australia, and this country's connection to broader international developments. Terms such as 'the global economy' have sounded like no more than jargon to many in the field of education. However, after attending the 1995 International Conference of University Teacher Organizations (ICUTO), Lewis, General Secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union, speaks of 'a strong sense of increasing impact of globalization on tertiary education,...the impact on education of the General Agreement on Trade in Services arising out of the GATT Uruguay Rounds,...the agreement to establish an international data base to monitor the development of performance indicators in higher education, ...NTEU [as] part of an international network of workers in education industries.' (Lewis 1995:3) In an era of global transformation teacher education in Australia must view itself as internationalist, reflecting an understanding of global and local perspectives.

Ginsburg et al (1991:12) draw attention to 'world system approaches which focus attention beyond the boundaries of the nation-state'. They cite Ramirez and Boli-Bennett (1982:15) who argue that 'education systems ... cannot be explained by standard comparative education discussions that treat national systems as essentially autonomous units developing in accordance with endogenous social and political forces'. Thus, if teacher educators are to make a significant contribution to the public education agenda, with a view to influencing debates shaping education policy in Australia, they need to critically examine and understand the Australian condition as an integral part of the global 'force-field'.

Garbutcheon Singh and Gale (1994) have drawn attention to the purpose and direction of teacher education in the future from this perspective, advancing the view that:

> The possibility of developing a teacher education program which represents the processes of globalisation, is based on recognition of teacher educators' duty to develop in-depth knowledge of these developments, and the need to stabilise and consolidate the plethora of demands on teacher education programs. A focus on globalisation could provide the stability necessary for any long-term vision and planning in teacher education. (p.26)

A key to the reprofessionalisation and empowerment of teacher educators lies in reflecting on key issues - including social justice and professional ethics. This entails shifting the educational locus by being strategically interventionist and proactive in agenda setting, thus enabling teacher educators to position themselves so as to be an integral part of national and international discourses of educational policy and practice which transform the profession.

And here teacher educators need to consider the potentially profound effect on the debate in education of entering the political arena per medium of alliances and collaborative networks with key interest groups and stakeholders at local, national and global levels. As Marginson (1993:240) contends, influencing the politics, policy and practice of education is not achieved merely by lobbying government. It also calls for involvement in political activity in the other networks and sectors which connect to government at all levels.

Conclusion

In recent years the agenda and discourse in contemporary Australian school and teacher education has been increasingly dominated by Federal Government policies based on market solutions to educational problems - the goal being national reconstruction and international competitiveness through education. Economic rationalisation, corporate managerialism, human capital and microeconomic reform have hijacked the master discourse in education policy and practice. Economic and management policies have emphasised the efficiencies to be gained, socially and economically, by 'synchromeshing' schools with the labour market. The result is demand by government for training in the vocational skills and knowledge which are sought in the workforce. This position is now driving debates about the conduct of education, and in the process displacing other perspectives and understandings of education. To that end the ethos, practices and outcomes of educational institutions are being constructed in terms of that discourse, which emphasises cost-efficiency and accountability, and operationalises these in instrumentalist, technocratic, commodified and managerialist terms.

In orchestrating the debate on public education in recent years, for all intents and purposes the Government has marginalised teacher educators. Given this situation, it is clear that teacher educators need to take a more proactive, interventionist stance in the quest for a rightful stake in the ownership of teacher education and the conduct of public education, which have become highly politicised.

The challenge for teacher educators is to understand the increasing need to become political actors, in terms of influencing the agenda and discourse in education. At the same time due recognition must be given to the reality of the present national politico-economic situation within the context of the global force-field. From these international and local perspectives government policy and practice can be critiqued, and substantive educational, social justice and ethical issues incorporated in the ongoing debate.

Given the pivotal role of teacher education in pre-service and (ongoing) in-service professional development in school and tertiary education, the so-called neutral approach is untenable. Teacher educators bear a major responsibility for positioning and asserting themselves as active participants, so as to receive due recognition by government; thereby initiating and/or being drawn into relevant policy developments in education. In pursuing this goal of reprofessionalisation and empowerment, the formation of meaningful 'chalkface' connections with teachers, support networks with other higher education sector workers and relevant professional associations, and alliances with allied sectors which connect to government, is essential. Thus teacher education can be recognised as a key professional area with a broad base of support.

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